

## Iconic dishes, culture and identity: the Christmas pudding and its hundred years' journey in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and India

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## **Iconic Dishes, Culture and Identity:**

### **THE CHRISTMAS PUDDING AND ITS HUNDRED YEARS' JOURNEY IN THE USA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND INDIA**

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#### **Abstract:**

*Asserting that recipes are textual evidences reflecting the society that produced them, this article explores the evolution of the recipes of the iconic Christmas pudding in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and India between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. Combining a micro-analysis of the recipes and the cookbook that provided them with contemporary testimonies, the article observes the dynamics revealed by the preparation and consumption of the pudding in these different societies. The findings demonstrate the relevance of national iconic dishes to the study of notions of home, migration and colonization, as well as the development of a new society and identity. They reveal how the preservation, transformation and even rejection of a traditional dish can be representative of the complex and sometimes conflicting relationships between colonists, migrants or new citizens and the places they live in.*

#### **Keywords:**

colonial food, colonial societies, national identity, national dishes, Christmas pudding, British Empire, cookbooks, recipes

## **Introduction**

‘Wherever they went in the world, the English took their Christmas with them,’ wrote the Australian historian Ken Inglis, before offering to his readers various accounts of traditional English Christmas dinners celebrated by colonists during the hottest Australian season (Inglis 1974, 125). Indeed, the English took their Christmas traditions with them around the world, including the famous Christmas pudding, the consumption of which has been recorded from Adelaide to Zanzibar (Symons 2007, 27; Maples 1897, 81, 341).

The continued existence of this peculiar tradition outside Britain – which persisted despite unsuitable climates, challenging cooking circumstances, and the development of settlers’ new

identities – demonstrates its significance for the colonists and their descendants. It also raises questions about the *raison d'être* of such persistence in the various societies these settlers created abroad. Asserting that cookbooks and recipes are textual evidences reflecting the society that produced them, and that an iconic national dish can be a symbol of identity, I argue that a micro-analysis of recipes for such a dish – in this case the Christmas pudding – can enlighten the relationships between colonists and colonies, between settlers and their new homes, and their new national identities.

The research presented in this article observes the evolution of the pudding's preparation in three contrasting situations: the North American ex-colony, the settlement colonies of Australia and New Zealand, and the exploitation colony of India. The choice of these places relates to the number of data available, but also to their particular interest as they reveal the diversity of imperial experiences, the varying relationships between colonists, colonies and the imperial power, and the question of nationalism in colonial/postcolonial circumstances (Pilcher 2016, 28). The English settlers of the New World had considered themselves as American since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, long enough to develop an identity of their own, but with culinary habits that were still deeply rooted in their origins, potentially presenting some ambivalence regarding food traditions. On the other hand, settlers in Australia and New Zealand were British subjects creating a new home for themselves and their descendants, potentially presenting some ambiguities regarding their national identity that could be reflected in the evolution of their culinary choices. In contrast, India was considered to be a temporary place to live, a society of rulers and ruled; a place where English standards had to be preserved, including food practices. The study of the relationships between these societies and the Christmas pudding provides a lens with which to explore the different forms of British colonialism and their connection with a culinary symbol of identity.

The aim of this paper is twofold. While it primarily tackles the question of identity and identity-formation and the relationships between colonists and colonies, it also seeks to assert the soundness of using a micro-analysis approach to explore recipes and cookbooks as historical sources. Various scholars have successfully taken this type of methodological approach. As Barbara Wheaton has pointed out, a systematic inventory of ingredients, techniques, and serving manners can illuminate the social significance of preparing and eating food (2015, 276-7). Helen Leach and Raelene Inglis (2003) used a systematic approach to recipes in order to study how New Zealanders responded to socioeconomic changes. Michael Symons (2009) analyzed the evolution cookbooks titles to reveal the social and cultural development in twentieth-century New Zealand.

As for Lauren Janes (2016), she examined the vocabulary used in colonial-inspired recipes to reveal the (limited) interaction between colonial foods and French cuisine.

Regarding identity and identity-formation, research has shown that food practices are an important reflection of how we define ourselves, both culturally and nationally (Scholliers 2001; Guy 2007). Furthermore, food provenance, preparation, and consumption also reflect people's status in the social and racial hierarchy (Mennell 1985; de Vooght, 2011; Hobart 2016). These questions also provide some global insight into the historical shaping of our world, as food travels with migrants across borders, cultures and societies (Spender 2003, 9; Bell and Valentine 1997, 18, Hobart 2016). Colonial cuisine is representative of such a perspective. As maintained by Cecilia Leong-Salobir (2011) in *Food Culture in Colonial Asia*, colonial cuisine is hybrid by nature (12-13). This hybrid characteristic – and its limits– has been described in a variety of situations from colonial commodities in the Metropolis to the adoption, and adaptation, of foreign food by colonists or colonized (Janes 2016; O'Brien 2016; Ray 2015).

Leong-Salobir argues that colonial cuisine was influenced by indigenous ingredients, cooking methods and food traditions, which intermingled with those of the colonists (2011, 12). While recognizing the validity of her statement, I would argue that when it comes to national symbolic dishes, national tradition prevails over local circumstances. Symbolic dishes reflect particular values, convey particular meanings, and provoke particular feelings, especially in an unfamiliar environment and/or at a time of transition (O'Connor 2009, 128). Indeed, a single food item can represent a nation's identity (Avieli 2005, 183; Bell and Valentine 1997, 165; Kolleen Guy, 2003). The Christmas plum pudding, 'one of the most distinctive British foods' according to Mason and Brown (2006, 420), is just such a dish, as it defines 'Christmas, family, nation and Empire' (O'Connor 2009, 137).

Leach and Inglis studied the Christmas cake because it has a social significance (2003, 144). Kaori O'Connor singled out the King's Christmas pudding because it represented a cultural response to the socioeconomic situation in the interwar period (2009, 128). Likewise, I've chosen the Christmas pudding because it has a long-lasting and profound national symbolism. Therefore, analyzing the evolution of its recipes, and of the cookbooks that contain them, is particularly appropriate to explore the relationship between negotiation of identity and culinary tradition.

Cookbooks are valuable historical sources that enlighten our cultural history (Appadurai 1988; Humble 2005). They tell us 'who we are and who we want to be' (Humble 2005, 278) and

reveal the society that produced them, as they regulate private practices as well as cultural and social customs (Singley 2013, 1-2). They inform about what is important in societies and cultures, and so offer a valuable lens to explore the past (Wessell 2013; Wheaton 2015, 278). Because they are the written expression of a culture's food practices – real or idealized – cookbooks reflect a variety of societal dimensions, including questions of identity, power, status, gender, or politics (Lehmann 1999; Ferguson 2012). As for colonial publications, they not only reveal the need to adapt to new and often challenging circumstances, but also reflect the ideal cuisine that was expected from the colonizer's wives, and the ideal image of what the colonial way of life should be (Singley 2013, 2).

Similarly, recipes “engage the reader in a ‘conversation’ about culture and history” and tell innumerable stories about the self, communities and societies (Floyd and Foster 2003, 2). As textual evidence, they can be considered as material culture that responds to – and consequently reflects – economic, social, political and cultural changes, including the construction of national identity (Leach and Inglis 2003, 143; Cusack 2000). Recipes tell us about food and dishes that matter, and connect people in time and space (Wall 2015, 2-3). Equally, recipes from colonial/post-colonial publications reflect these particular societies and the various dimensions related to colonialism, migration, and national identity. However, the existence of a recipe is no guarantee that the dish was ever prepared and eaten, although various ways of determining the use of recipes exist. If a recipe appears in a significant number of books for instance, and survives therein over many editions, it implies that same recipe was used enough to have gained a particular status (David Veart 2008, 5-6). The recipe for Christmas pudding, present in most sources for the whole period studied, is so perfectly relevant. Mentions of pudding consumption in contemporary testimonies are another evidence of the continuation of the tradition in the colonies.

## **Methodology**

Sixty cookbooks and household management guides – representing about eighty recipes – have been analyzed for this study. In addition to these sources, I've used contemporary testimonies as supportive evidence. Preference was given to first editions or reprints as early as possible. As emphasized by Wheaton, cookbooks that have been in print for a long period of time can be unrepresentative of current practices (2015, 280). In addition, the study was designed to maintain a balanced number of recipes analyzed for each region. Thus, the three New-Zealander cookbooks were grouped together with the thirteen Australian ones. Although they are two distinctive entities with their own histories and cultures, Australia and New Zealand share essential common points in the context of this research: both were settlement colonies with settlers of the same national

origin, and both became self-governing colonies, developing as a consequence an ambiguous relationship with the mother-country (Coombes 2011, 1). In addition, they share an antipodean climate and criticisms were expressed in both countries about the consumption of Christmas pudding in such an inappropriate temperature.

The methodology employed for this research presents similarities with that of Leach and Inglis (2003), namely a systematic analysis of ingredients and vocabulary using spreadsheet software. It also presents similarities to Symons' (2009) way of analyzing cookbook titles. In addition to the presence – or absence – of Christmas pudding recipes in the publications examined, the analysis focuses on the ingredients, cooking methods and serving advice, as well as the titles of the cookbooks and the names given to the recipes. Firstly, the textual information – keywords and quotations – was extracted and categorized. Authors, date and place of publication, book and recipe(s) titles were recorded as were the ingredients, methods of cooking and serving, and any comments made by the authors. Then those comments, titles and the modifications made to the recipes were systematically analyzed, allowing the exploration of the noticeable variations in vocabulary, ingredients and cooking methods across different places and time periods. The analysis of comments gave the study a qualitative dimension, providing a better understanding of the context and sometimes even the feelings expressed by their authors toward the pudding.

### **Christmas pudding: Particularities and Significance**

'The Christmas plum pudding has had a long and curious history,' wrote May Byron in 1917 (3). In fact, the Christmas plum pudding, at first known simply as plum pudding, has roots that go as far back as medieval England, although at that time it was a savory dish made with meat, root vegetables and dried fruit (Quinzio 2012, 56). Eventually, the meat was replaced by dried fruits – called plum (or plumb) – the dish became richer and sweeter, and subsequently associated with Christmas. In the seventeenth century it was banned by the Puritans, only to be restored by Charles II, all of which added a dramatic element to its history. It acquired its status as a national symbol two hundred years later, with some help from Charles Dickens and the Cratchit family.

The pudding can be described as a national culinary contradiction as well as a piece of English history. Indeed, its main ingredient had to be imported, and the pudding, much like other commodities considered typically British despite the foreign provenance of their ingredients, is representative of the global and imperial food trade that provided the country with products from around the world. A trade that shaped British's eating habits, tastes, and national culinary identification (Nützenadel and Trentmann, 2008, 4; Bryant and al. 2013, 40-1).

Demonstrably, there are other dishes which are emblematic of British cuisine. The full English breakfast competes with the continental one in hotels all around the world, while a plate of fish and chips is at once a symbol and a stereotype of British food (O'Connor 2013, 1-2; Panayi 2014, 86-9). Nevertheless, the pudding has specific qualities and a particular role that makes it different. Its *raison d'être*, Christmas, is already symbolically significant. Its cooking method marks it out too: while steaming was common in medieval Europe, it fell out of use everywhere except in England (Mason and Brown 2006, 379). Its preparation is also particular with superstitious rituals adding a touch of magic to the dish (Quinzio 2012, 63-4). As for the traditional serving manner, the holly and the flames could have a pagan or religious connotation, unless the latter represents the pudding rescued from the Puritans' fires, a quite extraordinary destiny as well (Quinzio 2012, 57).

Another of the pudding's particularities is its persistent connection with the British and Britishness (Mason and Brown 2006, 420). While other national or regional specialties were adopted outside their original country, the Christmas pudding was not. The French, for instance, rejected the English use of suet (Mason and Brown 2006, 420; Quinzio 2012, 62). In 1825, the French author Perigord judged the pudding to be an English "bizarre preparations unsuitable for either our health or our climate", advising his readers that "it should be left to those whose 'ironclad palates' were accustomed to such fare" (as quoted by Ferguson 1998, 623). Nonetheless, puddings have long been associated proudly with Englishness (Leach 2008, 391). Reflecting this national symbolism, the pudding has represented Britain in quite particular circumstances: in December 1918 it was served at the armistice dinner in Guadeloupe, together with French delicacies and Italian macaroni (Jennings 1998, 568). It was also meant to have been part of the ambassadors' gala dinner given in Constantinople (Peterson and Read 1856, 269-70). Unfortunately, the British ambassador forgot to explain its particular cooking method, and a "pudding broth" arrived at the table instead of the expected cannonball-shaped one – a mistake that seems not unique (Quinzio 2012, 61-2).

The presence of the pudding across the Empire is noticeable in colonists' testimonies. Catherine Parr Traill for instance, recounted her Christmases in Canada: "The increase of British settlers, however, has done something toward restoring a Christian feeling amongst us... and there was no lack of Christmas cheer in the shape of a large plum pudding" (1860, 70-2). The essential role of the pudding in Christmas celebrations is observable in all the colonies, including those where the weather was challenging. Iced Christmas puddings or jellied ones are occasionally mentioned in

testimonies; however, they were the exception (Sellick 2010, 303; Heard and Faull 1970, 276-9). Chauncy Maples, a missionary in east central Africa, offers a vivid image of the preservation of the tradition: “In the evening I gave a dinner party to the teachers and a few others – Christmas pudding, light out and the pudding ablaze, burning ‘brandily’ and ‘bluely’” (1897, 341).

This national symbolism is especially revealed in times of crisis. In the interwar period, the pudding became a political and economic instrument when the financial situation incited a new protectionism and the promotion of imperial products. An ‘Empire Christmas pudding’, entirely composed of ingredients from the Empire and the Commonwealth, was created for the royal family, who duly ate it. This royal pudding was highly publicized and the recipe widely printed both at home and across the Empire, for British subjects to share a moment of national and imperial communion (Leach 2008, 391; O’Connor 2009, 153). It is hard to say how successful this propaganda was. However, the royal pudding did not go unnoticed, according to an article of *The West Australian* suggesting imperial rivalry and confirming its significance:

Australia leads with raisins and sultanas in the matter of ingredients from any part of the Empire. India with only one teaspoon of spices will be but meagerly represented in the many national plum puddings that will, no doubt, be made through the British Empire (1927, 4).

The presence of the pudding on the front during the Boer war, the Great War and the Second World War as well as the efforts made by wives and mothers of the home front to provide a pudding despite food restrictions and shortages are all evidences of its importance (O’Connor 2009, 134; Hagerty 2015, 16; Brown 2004, 114-7; MOA FR 218 and 537; MOA D5423 Dec 1942; MOA D5338 Dec 1942). The publication of wartime recipes by the government, newspapers and magazines is another manifestation of its national symbolism and the supportive role given to recipes in such difficult times (Patten 1995; Minns 1980, 127).

## **Analysis and Findings**

The presence of Christmas pudding recipes in most sources examined is revelatory of its importance. Certainly, ingredients and cooking method evolved over time. However, while a recipe can be modified without challenging its symbolism, other alterations can reflect a cultural or social change as well as an evolution of the role or significance of the dish. Therefore, it was essential to establish a basis for the recipe (ingredients, cooking and serving methods) in order to analyze its evolution over the period of time studied. This basis has been determined using three



early English cookbooks: *The Art of Cookery* published by Hannah Glasse in 1747, *The Cook's Oracle* published by William Kitchiner in 1822, and the famous *Book of Household Management* published by Isabella Beeton in 1861. The latter is especially important because it gives specific indications as to how to serve the pudding at Christmas, and because it became a reference throughout Britain and the colonies (Loo 2013; Wessel 2013; Burton 1993). The ingredients recorded are suet (beef kidney fat), breadcrumbs, raisins, currants, peel, sugar, spices, flour, eggs, salt, milk, and brandy (if alcohol was included). The pudding would be boiled in a cloth for about six hours and, as described by Mrs. Beeton, served with brandy sauce, decorated with a sprig of holly in the middle, and brought to the table in a halo of burning brandy (1861, 668).

Interestingly, this manner of serving was rarely explained in the recipes examined: half a dozen recipes mention the holly and the burning spirit, while only four specify the brandy sauce or brandy butter (Maddocks and Wiley, 1914, 59; Farmer 1914, 119-20, 1921, 255-6; Routleff, 1926, 111-12; Kander 1941, 358; Dauntton-Fear and Vigar 1977, 42). All except one of these recipes were published during the twentieth century, suggesting either that the earliest authors did not see the need to give such information, or asserting the role of the pudding for the Christmas celebration, in contrast to the nineteenth century, when plum puddings were also part of the ordinary. This more specific role can be seen in the name given to the pudding as it evolved from plum pudding to Christmas plum pudding or Christmas pudding during the nineteenth century. One exception is the Indian publications: half the recipes kept the name 'plum pudding' into the 1930s, indicating a more conservative perspective. This conservatism is also evident in the list of ingredients – almost unmodified - and the cooking directions. Instruction to boil the pudding in a cloth was found as late as 1937 (Cook, 26), although many other authors adopted the use of a bowl or a basin by the end of the nineteenth century.

It cannot be said that these ingredients changed significantly in the other publications examined. The recipe was a steady one, standing the test of time and travelling around the Empire without drastic alteration. The ingredients could be modified temporarily according to circumstances though: wartime recipes might adapt the dish by recommending grated carrot, powdered eggs or margarine instead of suet (MLI 1918, 53; Anonymous 1943, 18). Reflecting the financial crisis of the 1930s, economical recipes such as the 'Hard-Times Plum Pudding' (Britain), 'the Economical Christmas pudding' (Britain), or the 'Cheap Christmas Pudding' (Australia) appeared in cookbooks (Craig 1934, 201; Wise 1935, 79; Prudence 1940, 294). Providing a cheaper alternative to the traditional recipe in order to help housewives to bring the iconic pudding to the Christmas table despite the difficulties, these recipes leave out the almonds

and brandy, and add in cheaper ingredients such as treacle, apples, dates, and even dripping or margarine in the Australian publication.

After the turn of the century, baking powder (or soda) regularly appeared in the Australian, New Zealand and American cookbooks examined. This could reflect an attempt to lighten the pudding, as its heaviness had long been an issue, especially in the southern hemisphere. Nonetheless, few other lasting modifications were made. They appear in most recipes at the same period. Firstly brandy, found in most cookbooks after Beeton's publication in 1861, then almonds and lemon found in most recipes since the late nineteenth century, again with the exception of the Indian ones (brandy appeared in Indian cookbooks in the late 1860s).

### ***India***

As previously mentioned, the recipes and comments in the Indian publications denote an attempt to keep the British tradition intact. Very few ingredients were added, and few modifications were made until the period between the 1910s and the 1950s. Even the "Christmas Plum Pudding (Indian way)" published in *The India Cookery Book* in 1869 (59) is identical to the English one, except for the butter. This consistency is remarkable, as the British recipes had been modified over time. Besides, according to the cookbooks examined, the British did adapt to Indian conditions, indicating that the authors had some knowledge of local products, and British housewives (and/or their cooks) were not averse to using them. However, the pudding tradition prevailed, denoting the preservation of English culture in India.

One cookbook was particularly important in colonial India: *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, published for the first time in 1888 by Flora Steel and Grace Gardiner. Reprinted for decades, the book was so successful that Steel was considered the Mrs. Beeton of British India (Burton 1993, 11). As a matter of fact, their Christmas pudding recipe was actually Mrs. Beeton's one – 'by far the best if modified a little', according to the authors, who added almonds and left the choice of spices to the readers (Steel and Gardiner 2010, 276). Their remarks on a variety of topics (food, housekeeping, servants, children and so on) indicate a strong commitment to 'not going native', as expressed by Uma Narayan (1995, 66). Regarding the pudding, a particular comment shows that local habits were not welcomed: "In India, it is the fashion to put ginger preserve, marmalade, etc., into the plum pudding, but to English tastes they spoil it" (Steel and Gardiner 2012, 276).

This conservatism reflects the authors' suspicion of any Indian customs, and their vigilance in avoiding alterations – or contamination – of any British domestic habits. It might seem to contradict the colonists' adaptation to local conditions, mentioned above. Actually, the term adaptation must be understood as adjustment, not adoption. While local ingredients were included in colonial cuisine, they were adapted to English recipes. For instance, ghee might be used instead of butter, or uncooked mutton fat instead of beef fat (Cook 1937). This adaptation has been discussed regarding various colonial circumstances, revealing the tension between pragmatism and cultural and/or national belonging revealed by the inclusion or exclusion of foreign foods (O'Brien 2016; Ray 2015). The lack of alteration to the Christmas pudding in India attests to the significance of preserving the authenticity of national iconic dishes in this particular environment. Steel and Gardiner's perspective is representative of the colonial situation in India, and their comments confirm the existence of the imaginary India described by Narayan (1995). Far from the alluring, exotic, 'tasty' India of spices, silks and shawls pictured in Britain, the India of Steel and Gardiner is the one of 'ignorant natives... vile practices... snakes and scorpions... the heat and the dust... an India that vividly signified the need for the civilizing mission of British rule' (Narayan 1995, 66).

At the time of the book's publication, the English had been in India for more than a century and the Raj was at its apogee. The increasing number of British residents – including housewives – had created 'isolated islands of England in a sea of India' (Burton 1993, 3). They lived in closed communities where they could preserve their lifestyle, their identity, and distinguish themselves from the colonized (Narayan 1995, 66). This propensity can be seen in the creation of whites-only clubs and hill stations, where the British elite could escape their alien environment, and the preservation, if not reinforcement, of the social hierarchy existing in the Metropolis (Sinha 2001 489-90; Kennedy 1996, 1, 88; Chaudhuri 1988, 519). The determination to keep up to British standards was also a part of the private sphere, and colonists' wives were expected to maintain a British way of life and represent its culture in the colony (Chaudhuri 1988, 518-20). This was especially important in the case of the Christmas pudding, because, as stated by Chaudhuri (1988, 520), festivities that were usually private in Britain became part of the public sphere in India, increasing the colonial conservatism of national tradition. This explanation may help to reconcile a divergent perspective about colonial food in India. While everyday meals could be a mix of English and local food, special events and their related dishes would not, especially when profoundly rooted in the colonists' national history. Thus, the iconic Christmas pudding, as a material representation of Britishness, had to keep its original features.

In contrast, American recipes reveal a detachment from the tradition and sometime even a rejection of the pudding and its national symbolism.

### *United States*

It is worth noticing that what is considered as the first cookbook published by an American author, *American Cookery* by Amelia Simmons in 1776, does not contain a plum pudding recipe. Noticeable too, is the presence of ingredients such as Indian corn and pumpkin, as well as a new vocabulary such as molasses or cookies (Simmons and Wilson 1984, xviii). These particularities suggest, according to the editors of the book facsimile, that Simmons' work 'was, in its minor scope, another declaration of Independence' (x). Nonetheless, reflecting the persistent eating habits – and culture – of these freshly independent Americans, many of Simmons' recipes were of English origin, and the same can be said about the other American publications examined.

The presence of the pudding is noticeable in American cookbooks: only two publications of the twenty examined did not include a recipe, while some contain more than one. However, these recipes were sometimes altered beyond recognition. A striking example is the 'Irish plum pudding' found in *A New Book of Cookery* by Fannie Farmer (1921, 255-6). The dessert, to be garnished with holly if used at Christmas, is the only pudding related to Christmas provided by the author, contrasting with her previous cookbook (Farmer 1914, 119-20). The name wouldn't be an issue if the recipe did not include the very Canadian maple syrup, excluded spices, and recommended to steam the pudding for twenty-four hours. What could be considered as an abnormality actually reflects the general tendency for modifications found in the American publications. Not only figs, dates, walnuts, cream, pickled peach syrup, fruit juice, molasses, sour milk and even crackers instead of breadcrumbs were added in recipes, but the preparation and cooking methods could also be drastically modified, with some recipes looking more like a baked bread-and-butter pudding than the traditional steamed one. Of course, some alterations were a pragmatic adaptation to local circumstances; nonetheless, the peculiar replacement of breadcrumbs by crackers between the 1830s and the 1860s suggests other motivations, as a shortage of bread or a surplus of crackers seem unlikely.

While the modification of ingredients and cooking methods do not suffice to demonstrate that food symbolism was used to redefine the authors' identity, their comments reveal more significantly the ambiguity between English tradition and American manners. In 1841, Sarah Hale expressed her reserve regarding the pudding: "As Christmas comes but once a year, a rich plum pudding may be permitted for the feast, though it is not healthy food; and children should be

helped very sparingly” (80). More incisive, Eliza Leslie wrote in 1857: “Do not set the pudding on fire to burn out the liquor. That practice has had its days and is over. It was always foolish.” (487). However, the main evidence regarding the American dissociation with Britishness lies in the vocabulary employed. The analysis of the titles of the cookbooks and the name of the recipes reveal a phenomenon not noticeable in the other publications examined. Seven out of the ten books published during the nineteenth century contain the word ‘America’ or ‘American’ in their title – clearly indicating a statement of identity that seems not needed in the twentieth century, when titles focused on the authors or on the readers (housewives). Those later publications also departed from their forebears by emphasizing the non-American nature of the pudding, with eight out of twelve recipes specifically indicating ‘English plum pudding and even ‘Old fashion English plum pudding’ – not only suggesting a different national identity, but also a distinction between English and American Christmas traditions, and, at least for one author, American modernity.

It seems unlikely that the change of vocabulary was not related to a change of circumstances. While in the nineteenth century the United States was a growing power with an emerging nationalism, by the beginning of the twentieth century it had become a greater influence internationally and a serious economic competitor to Britain (Bayly 2004, 439, 462; Hobsbawm and al. 2007, 198-9). The evolution of the cookery lexicon suggests the recognition of the new place of the United States in the world, and to some extent, the acknowledgment of the existence of a tradition related to another time and another place. This tradition has become a part of the nation’s history, and consequently of its historical imaginary, as demonstrated by the presence of a traditional pudding in a book about historical American recipes published in 1967 (Grant and al. 1969, 42). Yet Americans did not stop eating the iconic dessert. Indeed, they still do, but with a different meaning. The tradition evolved from its original symbolism about identity to a more cultural dimension in what could be called a Dickensian nostalgia resulting from the American reinvention of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* by Hollywood in the twentieth century (Rossi-Wilcox 2005, 432-3). This re-appropriation of the dish as a symbol of a particular Christmas spirit that corresponds to the American public imaginary allowed the creation of a new and acceptable role for the pudding.

This evolution from an identity-defining symbol to a moral one contrasts with the emblematic place of the pudding in Australia and New Zealand, although there, too, the perpetuation of the tradition didn’t go without saying.

### *Australia and New Zealand*

The willingness to keep up with tradition is manifest in the Australian and New Zealand cookbooks and testimonies examined, echoing Connelly's statement about the pudding's role as a reminder of the motherland in the colonies (2012, 100). However, the contradiction between the steadiness of the recipes until the 1940s, the persistence of the consumption of the pudding despite the heat and the negative comments found in some testimonies indicate a duality between the continuation of the tradition of the 'old country' and the creation of a new home and a new identity in the 'young' one.

The strong relationship of the colonies with England is noticeable in new settlers' testimonies. Mary Thomas, for instance, wrote that for their first Christmas in Adelaide in 1836, they "kept up the old customs... as far as having a plum pudding for dinner" (as quoted by Symons 2007, 27). In 1852, Francis Hare recounted how his group of diggers had a traditional celebration as well. His comments expose the recurring issue of the pudding's heaviness in summer: "We boiled it for 24 hours! It took us a week to digest! ... It was an act of virtue, a pleasure spiritual rather than bodily, to eat in this climate the good old English Christmas dinner" (as quoted by Inglis 1974, 128). Such an issue was of no consequence for Edward Abbott, who published the first Australian cookbook in 1864. Offering his readers the original recipe of Kitchiner to make "this national Christmas pudding", he clearly indicates his affiliation with and loyalty to the British Empire (50). Abbott also writes of his love for "these quaint old customs and ceremonies and hope they will be always kept up in the old country" (135), expressing the idealism of an author who was born in Australia and seeks to support 'the development of Australia to the glory of Britain' (O'Brien 2016, 135). This attachment to the old country was often seen in Australian colonial cuisine, according to food historian Colin Bannerman (1996), who states that: "British migrants cook trying to preserve their past and to make a new future at the same time" (9). Likewise, Australian historian Ken Inglis (1974), giving the Christmas dinner of roast beef and plum pudding as an example, writes that many migrants made efforts to keep traditions by eating dinners "as similar as possible to the feast they remembered" (125).

The analysis of the sources supports this attachment to British tradition, as most of the publications offer one or more recipe for a Christmas pudding quite similar to the original one: 'a testament' to Mrs. Beeton's Christmas traditions, as expressed by David Veart (2008, 262). Still, the pudding was by no means the only culinary demonstration of Britishness. In adapting to their new environment, the settlers tried to transform it according to their English standards, and local ingredients were frequently modified in order to produce familiar dishes (Wessell 2013). This conservatism could appear similar to the one found in India. However, its basis was as different as

the type of colonies these colonists were living in. In the Australian context, the incomers' narrative had to include the notion of 'home' and permanence, in contrast with the temporary nature of exploitation colonies (Grimshaw and Standish 2007, 5). These home-building and identity-formation process were similar in New Zealand, although the initial circumstance of settlement differs. New Zealand was not a penal colony. It was firstly of interest for traders, then to missionaries, before being annexed by Britain in 1840, more than fifty years after the arrival of the first convicts in Australia (Wakefield 1971, 2; Middletown 2008, 3). Nonetheless, despite these differences, the antipodean settlers similarly tried to create a new home while negotiating between their original and emerging new identity.

The colonists' endeavors to develop a distinct identity conflicted at times with their determination to preserve their English culture and lifestyle. Regarding the Christmas pudding, the issue was made more complex by the issue of the climate. Some people openly questioned the wisdom of sitting down to eat such a heavy and hot dessert in the middle of summer: "The white Christmas fantasy reaches the height of silliness on Christmas day, when we sat down in the blazing heat to eat roast ham or turkey followed by a hot, stodgy steamed plum pudding," states historian David Burton (1982, 133-4). He was not the first: in 1893, Philip Muskett denounced such unsuitable food in such conditions (115). The continuation of what could be described as an inadequate culinary tradition was also questioned regarding the development of Australian distinctiveness. A letter published in a Sydney newspaper in 1891 reveals its writer's Australian affiliation and her opinion on the pudding (as quoted in Santich 2012):

How long will it take our 'advancing Australia' to arrive at a Christmas confection that shall supersede plum pudding and become our national dish? (...) A confection that is not a close, heavy conglomeration of raisins, flour and suet that sentiment bids us to mix together year after year, but some delicate delicious, fairy-like masterpiece (16).

Yet, despite recurrent criticism, the consumption of the pudding persists in Australia and New Zealand until the present time (Cameron and al. 1980, 211; Burton 1982, 133-4). Some have tried to adapt the tradition to the antipodean climate. Occasionally jelly and ice-cream puddings recipes are present from the 1960s in the sources analyzed and Veart (2008) makes reference to earlier recipes, mentioning a jelly pudding recipe (tinted with marketing interest) from the Davis brand gelatin cookbook published in 1937 (262). However, echoing the sources cited here, he dates the

increase in recipes for cold Christmas pudding back to the 1950s (263). In any case, these attempts did not surpass the traditional pudding preparation and did not become a new tradition.

That's not to say that the pudding recipe was not modified. In the nineteenth century, brandy was often absent, or replaced by port wine, possibly due to a question of supply. Baking powder could be added as well, probably so as to make the pudding lighter. The titles of the cookbooks also evolved, suggesting a change of perspective. The *raison d'être* of the nineteenth-century cookbooks – namely, to help the colonists' housewives to provide decent meals despite the circumstances – can be seen in titles such as *Art of Living in Australia* and *Recipe Suitable for Australia*'. In contrast, some cookbooks published after the statute of Westminster (which established the self-governance of the dominions in 1931), differ from their predecessors with titles referring to Australia as a nation rather than a challenge. From the 1940s on, the addition of marmalade, dates, fruit juice, or golden syrup to the pudding recipe could represent the acknowledgement of Australian independence through the recognition of the country's particular climate, and, above all, Australian culinary preferences.

## **Discussion**

The analysis of the sources confirms the pudding as a main element of the traditional British Christmas celebration and a tangible representation of Britishness at home and abroad. While its ingredients reflect the global and imperial trades that shaped British eating habits, its omnipresence in colonial societies reflects the settlers' attachment to Britain and the importance of symbols of identity in an alien environment. The results of the analysis also reveal how variations in the recipes mirror the different situations inherent in the three case studies. The preservation, transformation, rejection and re-appropriation of the iconic pudding reveal the significance of food symbolism in changing circumstances, namely the creation of a distinctive American identity and society in the United States, the complex relationships between settlers, their new home and their connections with Britain in Australia and New Zealand, and the determination to preserve British culture and values in ruled India. In other words, the study of the pudding and its recipes tell us a variety of stories about the phenomenon that was the British Empire and its varied form of societies, including the ex-colony that was the United States.

Indeed, American cookbook authors notably began to question, transform and reject the English tradition at a time when the United States experienced an expansion of settlements, a significant increase of emigration from British and non-British lands, and, above all, an increase in national power parallel to the decline of Britain as a main authority – all factors of influence on



people's perceptions of their national affiliations and consequently on the creation of new traditions or the redefinition of older ones. The pronounced tendency for modification found in the cookbooks examined suggests a renegotiation of identity through the re-appropriation of the iconic pudding.

As for India, in a colonial society based on the ruling power's conviction of racial superiority, the determination to distinguish colonists from colonized was perceptible in the public and private spheres. The maintenance and even defense of Britishness was realized through the transmission of social values as well as national cultural traditions such as the celebration of Christmas – and the pudding. The emotional dimension related to food practices is another element to be taken into account. Colonists and their wives had left their families and friends behind to live either in colonial societies that were quite restrictive, or in isolated areas (Chaudhuri 1988, 519, 21-2). Many could feel lonely and homesick, especially women, whose lives were drastically changed by the move. General culture shock could also play a part, exacerbating such feelings. From that point of view, keeping up with national and familial traditions through the preparation of a highly symbolic meal, which was shared physically with family and friends in India and in spirit with those back home, could be comforting.

This emotional dimension can also explain why the early colonists of Australia and New Zealand were so attached to the tradition. While maintaining such a tradition could be perceived as a sign of a failure to make a home in Australia, it could also be seen as a way to transform an unfamiliar environment into a homey place. In any case, it represented a strong connection with the Empire and its mission to promote civilization (O'Brien 2016, 126-7). Nevertheless, while colonists in India had to preserve their national identity, settlers and their descendants in Australia and New Zealand had to negotiate an ambiguous national transition: becoming Australians and New Zealanders while still being British subjects and living in countries whose status and independence evolved over time. This ambiguity is perhaps the reason why, in contrast with Americans, Australians and New Zealanders did not re-invent the tradition. As discussed by Vear, this could be because, when the transition was done, it was too late, and so the tradition inherited from long-gone ancestors was kept, despite arguably being quite inadequate for a summer festival (2008, 275).

Further research, including other colonial societies, would be of help to define more precisely the various factors of influence involved in the continuation – or abandonment – of traditional customs, and the consumption of iconic national dishes. Three case studies are by no means an all-

inclusive historical account of the relationship between colonists and colonial societies, or the development of new national identities. Therefore, this exploratory article must be understood as a contribution to the discussion about culture and identity negotiations through food practices. Nonetheless, it has firstly demonstrated that far from being ‘just’ a dessert, the Christmas pudding played a symbolic role that reveals the multifaceted dimensions of national identity as well as social and racial prejudices in the colonies. Secondly, it has established the utility of cookbooks and recipes and the efficiency of their systematic analysis to study the complex relationship between colonists, settlers or new citizens and their new – temporary or permanent – place of living. Finally, it supports the argument that iconic national dishes can be a material representation of national identity and can reveal the complex relationships between the notions of home, migration, colonization and national identity. In doing so, they can be representative of a country’s history, its place in the world and its interaction with it.

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